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WEEKLY REPORT



THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

28 April 1965

**INTELLIGENCE AND REPORTING SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE INTERAGENCY
VIETNAM COORDINATING COMMITTEE**

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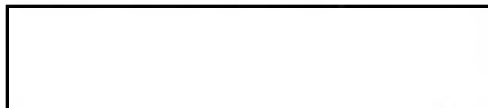
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THE SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

(22 April - 28 April 1965)

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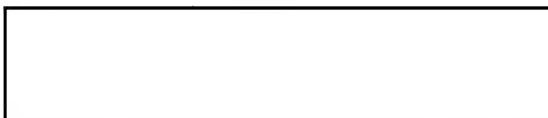
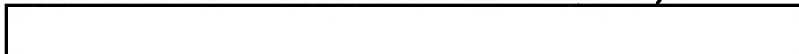
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THE WEEK IN PERSPECTIVE

Premier Quat appears to have won approval, at least from "Young Turk" elements of the military, for his plan to dissolve the Armed Forces Council. He appears to anticipate eventual support for his proposal to remove General Minh as commander in chief and to abolish the position altogether. Quat's maneuvers and his apparent support from elements enjoying Buddhist favor, however, continue to feed Catholic apprehensions over the ultimate orientation of his government. To avoid precipitating some reaction, Quat appears to be moving cautiously on such matters as Saigon's participation in any international conference on Cambodia and on the problem of replacing some cabinet ministers with whom he is having trouble.

Rice deliveries in Saigon continue to run below 1964 levels, and rice prices are rising accordingly. Increased Viet Cong efforts to deny rice from government's controlled areas and to use the crop themselves are indicated.

Viet Cong activity has remained at a low level for six consecutive weeks. Although ARVN ground successes and increased US participation in the war may have disrupted Viet Cong offensive plans, information received during the reporting period indicates that the main force may be continuing to improve its capabilities and that some units in the northern provinces may have been repositioned. While there are no positive indications of an imminent large-scale offensive, the Viet Cong are believed to retain the capability for conducting major actions in selected locales and at the same time conducting a countrywide campaign of terrorism, harassment, and small-scale actions. The prolonged lull in Viet Cong actions and inactivity of main force units is believed to be a temporary phase in the war which can be abruptly changed by the Communists at any time. It is still anticipated that, during the forthcoming rainy season, the Viet Cong will make a major effort, the initiation of which could possibly coincide with Communist May Day celebrations.

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I. SITUATION WITHIN SOUTH VIETNAM

A. POLITICAL SITUATION

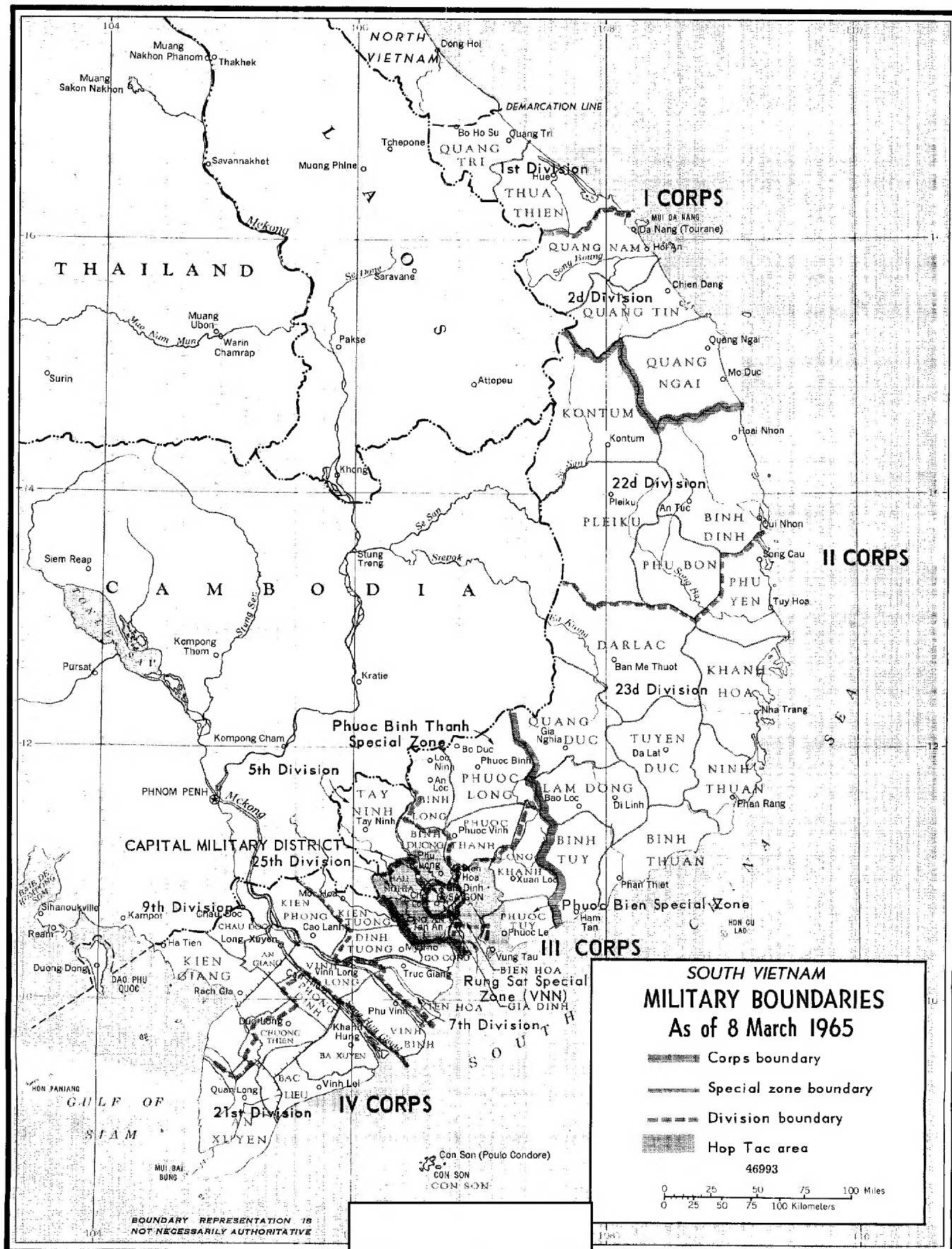
1. The political situation in South Vietnam remains quiet on the surface, but there continue to be disquieting factors, notably a growing uneasiness among some Catholics. Premier Quat appears confident that he is making progress in his efforts to bring the military under his control, but the direction of his planning and the elements from which he is drawing support may serve to foster such uneasiness.

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3. Quat reportedly has now agreed to a recommendation by Minh and Thieu that charges of corruption against suspended Saigon garrison commander General Dong be dropped for lack of evidence. Dong, whom Quat regards as a troublemaker in stirring up Catholic concern, is not to be reinstated to his Saigon command, however, but is being asked to exchange positions with General La, commander of the non-commissioned officers' academy in Nha Trang. Dong considers himself a victim of retaliation for his strong stand in repressing Buddhist street demonstrations against the former Huong regime. The charges of corruption against suspended naval commander Admiral Cang, a Catholic, have not been fully investigated, but Cang has been replaced by the naval chief of staff, Captain Tran Van Phan.

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4. A further source of anxiety to the Catholic community may be the current military trials of officers implicated in the abortive 19 February coup. The trials, which got underway in Saigon on 26 April, involve some 45 defendants. Nineteen of these are being tried in absentia, including coup ringleaders Colonel Thao and General Phat, believed to be hiding out with Catholic sympathizers. Although there are prospects that some of the defendants may receive lenient treatment, the presiding judges include several generals suspected by the Catholics of close ties to the Buddhist Institute.

5. Recent government hedging on the possibility of Saigon's participation in any conference on Cambodia's neutrality probably reflects Premier Quat's concern that such attendance could provide his domestic critics a rationale for moves against him. Earlier, Foreign Minister Do had told the press that South Vietnam would take part if the conference were limited to Cambodian questions. Quat, however, may fear that any gesture which might be interpreted as a move toward negotiations with the Communists could have severe political repercussions. A militant Catholic newspaper, Xay Dung, has already raised this flag in a 27 April editorial, alleging that Quat "is tending toward negotiations," but warning that the "present caretaker government...cannot decide the fate of the country."

6. There are indications of Catholic attempts to organize themselves in the formation during the past week of two new political groups. One a "Greater Union Forces" represents refugees from the North, and the other, an "anti-Communist Bloc," claims adherence of Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Catholic and Buddhist elements. A Catholic officer, while noting disturbing reports of Buddhist efforts to gain control of the army's political warfare directorate and of its personnel directorate, also expressed concern over recent Catholic efforts to arm their own followers. Although the strength of such Catholic movements is questionable, Catholic extremists have a further potential for action through the military contacts of Colonel Thao.

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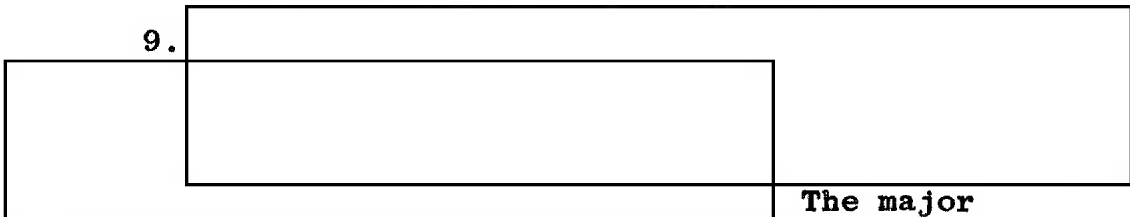


7. Saigon's leading labor figure, CTV President Tran Quoc Buu, has recently complained of Quat's weakness in controlling his cabinet, characterizing the situation as "anarchy." Buu has also voiced concern over the possible neutralist contacts in France of Vice Premier Tuyen, now on a goodwill trip to Africa, and over the alleged interference of National Police Director Lieu, and possibly of the Labor Ministry, in his own efforts to purge questionable elements from some union affiliates.

8. A gradual increase in the power of Police Chief Colonel Lieu and his mentor, I Corps commander General Thi, continues. Three provincial police chiefs loyal to Thi reportedly have recently been appointed in central Vietnam. In Quang Ngai Province, four new district chiefs and a regimental commander are Thi's men. The Quang Ngai Province chief, who dislikes Thi, fears he is slated for removal. Thi's candidate, a Buddhist doctor who recently moved to Quang Ngai, is said to lack administrative experience, but to be seeking authority to name his subordinates and to control provincial paramilitary forces. Thi's desire to see civilian province chiefs throughout his corps area may have support in Saigon. [redacted]

[redacted] the Quat government has decided to replace many of the current military province and district chiefs in central Vietnam with civilians in an effort to increase administrative competence and reduce the level of present corruption.

9. [redacted]



The major government activity during the past week has been the dispatch of delegations from the National



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Legislative Council to the provinces to take public soundings on the desire for convening a constituent assembly. Chief of State Suu, in a recent speech, revived his initial offer to resign if the popular will could not be expressed through an assembly. There have been indications behind recent events of differences within the government, particularly between Quat and Foreign Minister Do, and Quat and Vice Premier Tuyen; signs of impatience on the part of Social Welfare Minister Thuan, a leading Buddhist laymen, are also reported.

10. The US Embassy has noted new signs of internal friction among the Buddhist as the hierarchy seeks to exert control over reluctant segments. The southern Buddhist faction, under layman Mai Tho Truyen, held a conference explaining its differences with the Unified Buddhist Association (UBA) and its reasons for maintaining independent control of certain pagoda property. Buddhist Institute Chairman Thich Tam Chau has been making efforts to extend UBA control over the ethnic Cambodian Theravada Buddhists in the Delta, who have retained an aloofness from the dominant Vietnamese Mahayana sect. The suicide in Saigon of a young Buddhist novice and the attempted suicide of a nun, both apparently to dramatize the need for peace, appear to have lacked Buddhist sanction. The institute subsequently issued a communique calling for discipline to avoid a repetition of such acts. It has publicly maintained that the suicides were in protest against recent Viet Cong oppressions. One letter, which the Buddhists allege was left by the novice, contained a note of sensitivity to Viet Cong charges that the Buddhists are becoming tools of American propaganda, a factor which may set limits on Buddhist willingness to publicize their current anti-Communist campaign. At the same time, a group of young monks and nuns reportedly have urged a two-day cease fire during Buddha's birthday celebrations on 14-15 May.

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11. No attempted terrorism against Americans in the Saigon area was reported during the past week, although some concern exists over possible Viet Cong terrorism or inspired disorders in connection with the Labor Day celebrations on 1 May. According to Premier Quat, there is some government pressure for the early execution of Viet Cong terrorist Nguyen Van Hai, sentenced for the US Embassy bombing. Press reports indicate that the Viet Cong are continuing to disseminate leaflets in Saigon warning that Hai's execution will bring retaliation against the US AID official still in Viet Cong hands.

Economic Situation

12. The price of rice continues to rise, and rice stockpiles in Saigon and the Delta are substantially below their April 1964 level. Rice deliveries are running at a monthly rate of about 80 percent of deliveries in April 1964. There are indications of increased Viet Cong efforts to withdraw rice from areas of government access and of possible large Viet Cong shipments to central Vietnam for their own use. The recent discovery of a sizable Viet Cong rice cache in War Zone D indicates their ability to handle and finance large food stockpiles.

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B. MILITARY SITUATION

1. Viet Cong actions decreased from nine attacks and ambushes last week to five this week. Viet Cong main force units continued to avoid contact with friendly forces, but reacted when ARVN units entered Communist controlled areas. The 2nd Battalion, 101st Regiment, 325th PAVN Division in Kontum Province was accepted into the MACV Order of Battle during the reporting period.

Aerial photography has indicated the presence of antiaircraft weapons, possibly 37-mm, in southern Quang Tin Province. A four-gun position thought to contain 37-mm. guns was discovered and confirmed by aerial photography as being located approximately 20 kilometers south of Tam Ky, the Quang Tin Province capital. Another emplacement, a three-gun position, was located about 25 kilometers southwest of Tam Ky; it has not been determined whether any guns are present at this site. If the presence of 37-mm. guns is confirmed, it will mark the first time that antiaircraft artillery other than machine guns have been noted in the hands of the Viet Cong.

Numerous reports and troop sightings have indicated a buildup of Viet Cong forces in southern Quang Tin and northern Quang Ngai provinces. The lack of contact in a recent 12-day ARVN probing operation in the Kontum area formerly occupied by strong Viet Cong forces and elements of the PAVN 325th Division has raised speculation that these units may have moved to the Quang Tin/Quang Ngai area.

2. Communist-initiated activity remained substantially the same as last week in I, III, and IV Corps sectors, but increased slightly in II Corps. There were no attacks in I Corps, but the suspected buildup of forces in the area and harassment of US marines at the Phu Bai airfield complex has continued. Incidents against the civil population in the vicinity of the airstrip suggest the Viet Cong may be engaged in a program to discredit the marines' defensive capabilities. There are no firm indications, however, that an imminent large-scale offensive against the marines is in the offing.

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Viet Cong activity in the II Corps area included an increase in terrorism from last week, but no attacks were reported. Most significantly, there is a strong possibility that forces previously reported in northwestern Kontum Province have moved. In III Corps, one attack against an outpost in Long An Province was reported. The remainder of the slightly increased low-level activity consisted of extortion, kidnaping of Vietnamese youths and laborers, and harassment of New Rural Life Hamlets and government outposts. Viet Cong activity was especially noted in Long An, Phuoc Tuy, Binh Duong, and Binh Long provinces where government control is nominal.

On 23 April, an estimated Viet Cong battalion ambushed Junk Force and Popular Forces personnel in Kien Hoa Province of IV Corps area. Of the 80 friendly personnel involved, about half were either killed, wounded, or reported as missing. Viet Cong losses are unknown, but an unconfirmed report indicated that approximately 100 were killed or wounded. Also in Kien Hoa Province, the Viet Cong on 20 April ambushed two Popular Forces platoons with four friendly soldiers wounded and five Viet Cong killed. The third attack reported from IV Corps was an assault on a Popular Forces platoon on 19 April in Phong Dinh Province resulting in friendly losses of three killed and five missing. The remainder of Viet Cong activity consisted of terrorism against outlying centers of government control and influence.

3. ARVN ground activity increased this week, both in numbers and in contacts with the Viet Cong. There were 81 operations of battalion strength or larger, of which 33 resulted in one or more contacts with the enemy. This compares to 75 operations last week, with enemy contact in 31. Small unit actions this week totaled 17,008, of which 81 achieved contact. There were 16,217 small unit actions last week, 49 of which resulted in contact.

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Government casualties increased to 422 (102 KIA) from the 357 (90 KIA) last week. Viet Cong casualties also increased, with 458 known casualties (310 KIA and 148 captured). This compares to 321 last week (260 KIA and 61 captured). Not included in these totals is a RVNAF submission of 297 unsubstantiated casualties from an operation in Quang Tin Province. This is a departure from the RVNAF's normal practice of reporting only casualties confirmed by Viet Cong body count. The ratio of Viet Cong to government killed, however, remains high at 3:1 even when using the conservative figure of confirmed Viet Cong killed.

During the week, Viet Cong weapon losses were 137 as compared to 117 for the government. This is the third time in two months that government losses have been lower than the Viet Cong and reverses a long-standing trend. This favorable development is attributed to improved discipline and morale on the part of government forces.

4. Virtually all government engagements with the Viet Cong this week occurred during government-initiated operations. Most of these operations were conducted in relatively remote areas under Communist control, reflecting a major US advisory effort of encouraging the ARVN to undertake operations against Viet Cong base areas during the present period of Communist inactivity. Vietnamese commanders are being urged to take advantage of the temporary lull, to extend their operations and to ascertain current Viet Cong capabilities.

5. The most significant operation of the week and one which did not go well for the government was conducted by the 2nd Division in Quang Tin Province. The operation was launched to break Viet Cong dominance of the area between the province capital of Tam Ky and the Viet An district post near the Quang Ngai border. However, like three earlier operations, this effort failed to achieve the desired result.

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Although the six battalions of friendly forces were well provided with artillery and air support, neither was used during the critical attack phase when the Viet Cong launched a two-battalion counterattack supported by mortars, recoilless rifles, and machine guns. In addition to employing 81-mm. mortars, the Viet Cong for the first time used 4.2 in. mortars. Although suffering few casualties, the friendly forces became so unnerved that two troops of armored personnel carriers left the field of battle. This induced an attacking Marine battalion to follow suit, and within less than an hour, all government battalions withdrew in disorder. Heroic individual actions were taken by some Vietnamese commanders and US advisors in steadying soldiers shaken by their first experience under heavy mortar fire. However, poor performances by other Vietnamese officers resulted in two being relieved of command and a third being removed from the battlefield.

An analysis of the operation revealed a number of weak points. Specific intelligence of Viet Cong positions was lacking and no effort was made to obtain it. Lack of a fire support coordination center resulted in the ineffective use of air and artillery, and the use of artillery was ignored during the crucial phases of contact with the enemy. Inexperience of armor and infantry in working together and poor command procedures were also evident.

Final results of the operation were 53 Viet Cong killed (body count) with unsupported estimates of up to an additional 297 being killed by air, artillery, and ground fire. Friendly losses of 26 killed, 86 wounded, and 28 missing were relatively high, but not enough to justify breaking off the attack or retreating in the face of the enemy.

6. A successful operation was the third search-and-destroy operation in as many weeks in Binh Dinh Province. The operation was conducted ten miles north of Qui Nhon and resulted in 73 Viet Cong

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killed and 23 captured against friendly losses of 15 killed (10 US) and 19 wounded. US casualties occurred when two helicopters were shot down with the loss of both crews. Another helicopter pilot being killed during a later heliborne lift and a US advisor was killed while aiding a wounded ARVN soldier. The nine fatalities suffered by US helicopter crewmen was the highest total thus far sustained in a single airmobile operation.

The operation's success was attributed to a well-conceived plan, taking advantage of intelligence reports locating the Viet Cong in a vulnerable position, and the effective employment of airpower when the enemy was caught in the open.

7. MACV's confirmed Order of Battle holdings for main force units, which include the 2nd Battalion, 101st Regiment, 325th PAVN Division, are as follows:

Regimental Headquarters	5
Battalions	54
Separate companies	142
Separate platoons	35
Hospitals	1
Personnel Strength	39,000

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C. RURAL RECONSTRUCTION

1. On 20 April, the III Corps commander assumed personal direction of the high priority Hop Tac program being conducted in the seven provinces surrounding Saigon. The need for new impetus in this program has been underscored by reports of sagging civilian morale as the result of Viet Cong military activity in areas officially declared secure. Recent actions which have contributed to apprehension among the civilian populace include the overrunning of an outpost in Long An Province on 23 April in which 16 were killed, the harassments against three hamlets in Gia Dinh Province, and an ambush on the Bien Hoa highway, only 5 kilometers from Saigon, which resulted in the death of two civilians (one US), the wounding of two more and the kidnaping of several others.

A Corps inspection team has been formed to seek out ineffective cadres and supervise construction of hamlets in the Hop Tac area. Plans have been made to step up both clearing and psychological operations, and to implement the securing of selected hamlets. There is also to be an expansion of mobile checkpoint operations in support of the population and resources control program.

2. With regard to the reported cabinet decision to replace most of the current province chiefs and district chiefs in Central Vietnam with civilians, two exceptions to the planned changeover are the provinces of Phu Yen and Binh Dinh, where major problems are military in nature.

In I Corps, where the commander, General Thi, proposes to name civilians to all key administrative posts, one province already has a civilian province chief. He is Hoang Xuan Tuu, chief of Quang Tri Province, who has been on duty since early 1964.

3. The US Mission, in a recent report, assessed the current status of the Chieu Hoi Program, which attempts to encourage defections from the Viet Cong. Although established in February 1963, this program has tended until recently to lack strong government

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direction. Since late 1964, the GVN at US Mission urging, has put a greater amount of effort into the program. The more important improvements include raising the directorship of the program to ministerial level, improvement in the selection and training of field administrators, and the weeding out of incompetent or unsavory officials connected with the program.

The present Chieu Hoi minister is Tran Van An, a politician of long experience, who, according to the Mission report, has shown that he is behind the program and wants to improve it. Although enthusiastic, An is characterized as being strong on concepts and ideas, but weak in operation implementation.

There has been an increase in the number of military and political Chieu Hoi returnees in the last three months, especially in March. However, the US Mission report cautiously suggests that the increase in defectors may be due as much to a larger number of individuals in the ranks of the Viet Cong who have not been thoroughly indoctrinated as it is to an expansion of the Chieu Hoi effort. Recent ARVN victories, the use of jet aircraft against in-country targets, and the bombing of the DRV may have helped to condition individual Viet Cong adherents and supporters to defector appeals.

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II. THIRD COUNTRY DEVELOPMENTS

A. CAMBODIA

1. Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia announced in a speech in Phnom Penh on 24 April that the United States, South Vietnam, and Thailand had no right to attend the proposed Geneva Conference on Cambodia, pointing out that they did not sign the 1954 Geneva Accords. Thailand did not attend the 1954 conference.

[redacted] Sihanouk's position resulted from Communist Chinese pressures and the United States Embassy in Phnom Penh fears that Sihanouk may force a break in United States/Cambodian relations which would scuttle both the conference and plans for large-scale developments of the Mekong River. This may be the real motivation of the April 26 demonstration at the US Embassy in Phnom Penh ostensibly protesting a Newsweek Magazine article.

2. The Government of South Vietnam has publicly indicated willingness to participate in the proposed Geneva Conference on Cambodia, but this is dependent on GVN approval of the agenda proposed by the co-chairman, i.e., Britain and the USSR.

3. On 28 April the US Army Attache in Phnom Penh was invited by the Cambodian government to visit the site of an alleged border violation in which one Cambodian was reportedly killed. MACV, investigating the incident at this time, reports there may be some substance to the Cambodian charge. Sihanouk has twice warned that Cambodia would break relations if there were another such incident, and he may, if he desires, use this one to precipitate the rupture.

B. AFRICA

1. South Vietnamese diplomatic representatives will visit Addis Ababa on 2 May and Cairo 8 or 9 May to prepare for the visit of Tran Van Do, South Vietnamese Foreign Minister. The purpose of Do's trip is to counter efforts of NFLSV representatives in Africa.

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2. Deputy Prime Minister Tran Van Tuyen continues his goodwill mission in Africa. Tuyen's delegation has already visited the Ivory Coast, Senegal, and Morocco.

C. AFRO-ASIAN CONFERENCE.

1. Saigon informed the United States Embassy that it has received an official invitation to attend the Afro-Asian conference in Algiers 29 June. Because of recent reports that some moderate African states will not attend the Algiers conference, Foreign Minister Tran Van Do expressed the hope to the United States that moves be coordinated so that moderate states either attend or boycott the conference in unison.

D. INDIA

1. According to Reuters, Indian President Radhakrishnan proposed publicly the cessation of hostilities and formation of an Afro-Asian force to police the border between North and South Vietnam and prevent escalation of the present conflict into a major war. Peiping propaganda broadcasts claim the proposal is designed to benefit the United States.

E. THIRD COUNTRY AID

PHILIPPINES:

Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge discussed the proposed 2,200-man Philippine task force with President Macapagal on 22 April. The Philippine President stated that the task force would be sent immediately, after he had consulted with a few people in Congress, with whom he anticipated no difficulty. Macapagal asked Lodge to assure President Johnson that the Philippines would always fulfill its obligations as an ally under SEATO and the Philippine-US Mutual Defense Agreement, and that this, of course, applied directly to the Philippine task force for SVN. In a subsequent conversation on 22 April, National Defense Secretary Peralta was less sanguine than President Macapagal about obtaining Philippine congressional approval but promised to move ahead with plans.

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Subsequent to the Lodge mission, on 23 April Peralta told JUSMAG Chief General Tacon that he had ordered the vice chief of staff to start training officers for the engineering battalion which would at this stage be reduced to approximately 1,219. Peralta felt that this group, which excludes the battalion combat team, could be sent to Vietnam without Congressional authority. Peralta added that the matter would be discussed by the NSC at which time Macapagal would be able to ascertain opposition Nacionalista reaction to the proposal.

JAPAN:

Ambassador Lodge stressed to Japanese Prime Minister Sato the importance of Japan's role in President Johnson's Southeast Asia development proposal. Sato said Japan would like to respond, but would find it difficult to do so while US bombing of the DRV continued and the military situation in South Vietnam remained unsettled.

Sato added that Japan would now make available to the GVN 9.5 million dollars in commercial credits. Before the meeting with Lodge, Sato turned down a Foreign Office proposal for a dramatic "peace for Asia" economic aid program calling for a Japanese contribution of 500 million dollars. Sato objected to its magnitude and felt that it should be more narrowly focused. The US Embassy in Tokyo thinks a personal visit by no less a personage than U Thant may be required to urge Sato to approve a meaningful Japanese contribution.

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III. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BLOC

A. COMMUNIST POSITION ON VIETNAMESE NEGOTIATIONS

There has been no indication of any change during the week in the Vietnamese or Chinese position toward negotiations on Vietnam. Both Hanoi and Peiping propaganda media continue to attack President Johnson's proposals for unconditional discussions. On April 24, Hanoi radio characterized the President's proposals as a "booby trap," and in language similar to that used by the Chinese the radio broadcast concluded that the "Vietnamese people are not frightened by your stick and will not stoop to beg for your carrot."

During the week, DRV propaganda continued to stress that the formula set forth by Premier Pham Van Dong for a settlement of the war, which included a cessation of attacks on the DRV and a withdrawal of US forces, must be "recognized as the basis" for a settlement of the Vietnamese situation.

Peiping continues publicly [] to insist that without US troop withdrawal there can be no talk about a peaceful settlement. Chou En-lai repeated the four-point Vietnamese proposal for negotiations in his farewell speech in Djakarta and the speech was highlighted by the Chinese press on 26 April.

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B. COMMUNIST POSITIONS ON A CAMBODIAN CONFERENCE

Prior to the expression of US interest in an international conference on Cambodia, all the Communist powers involved in Southeast Asia publicly backed the proposal. It is clear, however, that Moscow, Hanoi, and Peiping had different attitudes and expectations concerning such a meeting. The Soviet Union had originally worked cautiously to promote a conference, waiting until 3 April to approach the British with a draft co-chairman note endorsing Cambodia's mid-March proposal to convene an international conference. Several Soviet officials had also indicated privately that a Cambodian conference would naturally provide the opportunity for informal talks on other subjects, such as Vietnam. This week, however, the USSR in its propaganda commentary indicated that the US must not be allowed to turn a conference on Cambodia into negotiations on Vietnam.

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The North Vietnamese quickly endorsed Prince Sihanouk's 15 March call for a conference. They apparently regarded a meeting as involving little risk for Hanoi's interests and as having some potential advantages. Both Hanoi and Moscow in their 17 April communique stated that a conference on Cambodia at this time "would be useful."

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